

**Four Hallmarks of Humility, Part 2**

Scripture: Luke 17:3-4

Code: 42-218

We open the Word of God together to the seventeenth chapter of Luke and I want to read for you the opening four verses. Luke chapter 17 verses 1 through 4 and I'm reading from the New American Standard translation which is the one I always preach from. "And He said to His disciples, 'It is inevitable that stumbling blocks should come, but woe to him through whom they come. It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble. Be on your guard. If your brother sins, rebuke him. And if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times saying, 'I repent,' forgive him.'"

Now in our last message together we looked at this text. And we noted for you that there are some benchmarks of humble discipleship here. Humble disciples do not lead others into sin. They live their lives in such a way so as not to be a stumbling block to others, either by teaching false doctrine or by living sinfully. We said secondly that not only do humble disciples of Christ not lead others into sin, they, however, are eager to forgive others when they do fall into sin. There's this wonderful preoccupation with holiness. We want to live a holy life to set a holy example. We want to proclaim a true understanding of the Word of God. We want to do all we can to avoid causing anyone to stumble in error or in sin. We have a virulent, strong dislike for sin. But, on the other hand, we are eager to forgive one another when we do fall into sin. It is this wonderful balance. It's two sides of pursuing holiness, pursuing it by avoiding sin and pursuing it by dealing with sin.

And as we looked at that second point, which was where we were when we closed last time, we were saying how important it is for us to confront sin. If your brother sins, rebuke him. That's the only way the Bible knows to deal with certain sins, by open rebuke. "And if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day and returns to you seven times saying, 'I repent,' forgive him...implied...seven times a day," or to use the language of our Lord as recorded in Matthew chapter 18, "Forgive seventy times seven." Four hundred and ninety times, if need be, not that that's an actual fixed number, but forgive endlessly. Humble disciples of Jesus Christ then are marked by their forgiveness. We have forgiveness in the heart. We are eager forgivers.

Now Jesus is saying, as you note in verse 1, to His disciples. And He is calling upon them to think and act distinctly opposite the religious leaders who dominated Jewish culture, namely the Pharisees and the scribes. They were purveyors of false doctrine which caused people to stumble. They lived hypocritical lives. Inwardly they were full of dead men's bones, they were stinking, they were foul,

they were corrupt, though on the outside they were painted or whitewashed to make themselves look good. They were the classic hypocrites. They had no interest in forgiving anybody. They kept their distance from all sinners, as we have learned. They had nothing but contempt and disdain for the people who were outside their group and in their view beneath them. They condemned Jesus for associating with sinners, even penitent sinners and tax gatherers who in their judgment were the lowlifes to whom the rabbis said they would not even so much as teach the Law, for they would have to come close to them to do that. In fact, they were convinced that Jesus' association with those kinds of people was proof positive that He operated not by the power of God but by the power of Satan. They said He does what He does by the power of Satan.

They had no interest in humbling themselves. They were proud, self-righteous people and they purveyed that view of religion across the land of Israel because they basically had control of the synagogue system and there was one in every location. And so they were scandalizing people, causing them offense, causing them to stumble and had no interest in confronting the sin of sinners, calling them to repentance and forgiving them. Jesus then juxtaposes what He wants out of His disciples to the very Pharisees and scribes who were always in the crowd alongside the disciples. And as I said last time, as you flow through these last months of our Lord's life in the gospel of Luke, you see Him talking to massive crowds, so massive they are tens of thousands of people stepping on each other, it tells us. And yet in the midst of this massive crowd there is a group of Pharisees and scribes to whom He directly speaks time and again. And sometimes on other occasions, even in their homes. And there is also this group of disciples and those two are always in contrast. In verse 3 He says, "Be on your guard." That phrase, that warning, that command is used, the very words in the Greek are used elsewhere in the New Testament with reference to the scribes and Pharisees. Beware of them, He says repeatedly. And here it certainly makes good application to have them in view as well, for they are the proud, they are the offenders, the scandalizers and they are the ones who have no interest in forgiving repentant sinners. And so what Jesus asks for is against the grain of the religion of His time. And what He asks for is that we do nothing to lead anyone else into sin, either by teaching them error or by setting an example of sinfulness. Secondly, we are to be eager when people fall into sin to confront, call for repentance and forgive relentlessly.

Now that's pretty much what we covered last time. And I want to take off a little bit from the text, if I might, and talk to you about how important it is to be a forgiving person. We live in a culture that doesn't understand this. We live in a culture that is so obsessed with pride, so obsessed with self-esteem, so obsessed with personal independence and personal and individual rights that anybody who is offended by anybody is applauded if they respond with intolerance, retaliation, and vengeance. Vengeance has been turned into a virtue. The media, for example, is filled with these vengeful superheroes who kill everybody in sight who has offended them. Courts are filled on a much more real basis with law suits, hundreds of thousands of them every single year, so many that about three out of every four lawyers in the world lives in the United States just to keep up with the lawsuits as everybody tries to get his or her pound of flesh out of anybody who has done anything that has

offended them.

Psychologists have jumped on this unforgiving mentality and many of them have concluded that forgiveness is unhealthy, forgiveness is toxic, anger is beneficial, anger vented is very beneficial because it allows you to insulate yourself to protect your self-esteem and to throw back the harm that other people are inflicting on you. The result of all of this, of course, is you have an elevated hostility. You have a very angry culture. And it seems as though the younger they are, the angrier they are. Vengeance has become a way of life with people who are fed on pride. Bitterness takes over their hearts and becomes a destroyer of their own lives and very often of the lives of people around them. We read consistently about the most bizarre crimes of anger where people kill one or two or more or many out of sheer rage over offenses that they calculate have been wrought against them. It is an angry, self-destructive culture. Over against that, the Lord calls for us to be forgivers...to be forgivers in exact opposition to the way the world thinks and functions because it's dominated by pride. If you invent a culture of self-esteem, it's an easy sell because you have a proud unregenerate mass of humans who are eager to buy it because it's already what they believe.

We are, on the other hand, called to be humble, selfless and therefore forgiving. Three times in the Bible we read, "God gives grace to the humble," Proverbs, James, 1 Peter, "God gives grace to the humble but resists the proud." Twice in the gospel of Luke, chapter 14 and verse 11 and chapter 18 and verse 14, Jesus said, "Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." Scripture constantly calls on us to be humble. And out of that humility comes a heart of forgiveness. And we're looking at verses 3 and 4, this morning, just as sort of a background, and I want to give you a practical sort of applicational usage of this great principle of forgiveness that I trust will be a help in your own life. Humble believers do not give offense, neither do they take offense. Humble believers do not sin against others, neither do they hold grudges when others sin against them. We don't lead people into sin, we lead them out of sin. And we do that by being willing to confront. If your brother sins, rebuke him. If he repents, forgive him. Do this relentlessly as verse 4 indicates.

This is the principle given by Luke that is elucidated in more detail in Matthew chapter 18. In Matthew chapter 18 verses 15 to 20 the process is played out in detail. If your brother sins, you go to him. If he repents, you've gained your brother and it's over. If he doesn't you take two or three witnesses and you confront him again about his sin and then you have two or three witnesses who can confirm his response. If he still doesn't repent, you tell the whole church with a view to the church pursuing him to call him back from sin. If he doesn't listen to them, you put him out of the church. You treat him as an unbeliever for there is no real evidence he is not an unbeliever. You treat him as an unbeliever with love and compassion and an evangelistic attitude but you do not allow him to be embraced within the fellowship of the church. These are the details that are laid out in Matthew 18 from the principle that is given here in Luke 17:3.

We're not going to dig into those details this time. Suffice it to say, what we want to look at is the conditional forgiveness that is expressed in these verses. We forgive when someone repents. We forgive when someone repents. The question always comes up, is it necessary for someone to repent to be forgiven? Do we withhold forgiveness until someone repents? Is that always what we do? Is there only conditional repentance?

Well this is obviously conditional because the condition is given. If your brother sins, you rebuke him. And if he repents, you forgive him. And if he repents seven times, you forgive him seven times. This is forgiveness connected to a condition...conditional forgiveness.

Now this kind of sin, which is also the issue in Matthew 18, is the kind of sin that reaches a level where it is regular, where it is a course of action, where it becomes a pattern, where it becomes a direction. This is the kind of sin that is planned, that is willful, that is premeditated, that is habitual. And that's why I like to use the word directional. Even among a believer we know from 1 John that the pattern of sin has been broken and there is a new pattern of righteousness, but even within that new pattern of righteousness, the good deeds to which we were foreordained and regenerated, even that pattern of good deeds and righteousness is interrupted by sin and sometimes with believers it is willful sin, directional sin, the sin of repeated choice, the sin that is even public and manifest. Those are the sins that are to be dealt with on the level of conditional forgiveness, when they involve the church. This is a parallel to Matthew chapter 18. You go to the person when there are sins like that and ultimately you have to take it to the church if they don't repent. And until they repent, there is not a restoration to the fellowship of the church.

However...and by the way, I might say as a footnote...this is not a specific kind of sin, but a flow or a pattern of sin, a direction of sin. It could be a number of different kinds of sins in which a person continues to pursue a path away from what is right. But not all sins are at that level and not all sins fall into the category of conditional forgiveness. There are sins that are irregular. There are sins that are not premeditated. There are sins that are...that are not willfully, habitually planned and engaged in. They are not the normal course chosen by the sinner. There are those sins into which believers fall because we still live in the fallen flesh that do not reach the level of this conditional forgiveness.

For example, if for just a moment you'll turn to Galatians chapter 6 you'll find here a helpful portion of Scripture, Galatians 6:1, "Brethren," we're talking in the family here, "Even if a man is caught in any trespass, if a man is caught in any trespass." This word caught, the idea of being caught in a *paraptoma*, the idea here is a fall. Literally the word means being tripped up, or it means being trapped. You...you didn't see it coming, it's not premeditated, you got trapped into this, you got drawn into this, you stumbled into this, you fell into this. It's rather than the premeditative kind, the planned kind of sinning. If anybody is caught in a fall, a stumbling, tripped up, you who are spiritual...that

would be those who walk in the Spirit as defined in the previous chapter in detail...you who are spiritual, restore such a one. Restore, *katartizo* means to mend or repair. In a spirit of *prautetos*, a spirit of humility, meekness. Actually translated humility in James 1:21. When you see somebody that falls into a sin, you who are spiritual, you mend that person, you restore that, you repair that person in a spirit of humility looking to yourself lest you also be tempted, realizing that because we're all human, you could have been tripped too. And in that way, verse 2, you bear one another's burdens and fulfill the law of Christ, and the law of Christ is a law of love. You fulfill the loving attitude that you should have toward your brother or sister in Christ by bearing the difficult burden of being human and stumbling into sin. The word "burden" there is *baros*, heavy load is hard to carry. We all have the burden of temptation. We all have the burden of our fallenness. We all have the reality of stumbling into sin. And when we do, what do we...what do we who are spiritual do with someone? We come, we repair, we restore in meekness and humility realizing that that's part of being human, and we're also human. And that's familiar ground to us.

Now this has to be easy for you to understand, that there are some patterns of sin and directional sins and sinful choices that must be dealt with openly with a rebuke, with a process of discipline as laid out in Matthew 18, but not everything gets to that level. How easy is that to understand? Well just look at your marriage for a moment and ask yourself how productive it would be if every single time your spouse did something less than what was perfectly righteous you turned it into a confrontation. It would be over. They would leave. You'd drive them out. It can't be done. You can't even do that with your children. Imagine in the church if every single person that you know in this church every time they did something that wasn't perfectly righteous, you felt you had to set in motion public confrontation. It couldn't be done...it couldn't be done. You couldn't keep up with it in your marriage and then if your spouse decided to do the same to you, you'd spend all day rehearsing your shortcomings. Why weren't you up at four praying? Why weren't you up at three thirty praying? Why weren't you up at four thirty reading? You forgot to do this. You didn't do that. You didn't speak very kindly. You honked at that guy going to the market when he was in your way in the parking lot. You can't...you couldn't live that kind of relentless confrontation. We understand that we're human.

That's why there are...there are sins with which we deal all the time for which we offer an unconditional forgiveness. Okay? For example, 1 Peter 4:8, "Keep fervent in your love for one another, for love covers a multitude of sins." There are a whole multitude of sins that love just blankets, hides, doesn't bring up, doesn't confront. Proverbs 10:12 says, "Love covers all transgressions." Listen to 1 Corinthians 13, "Love does not take into account a wrong suffered." Or as one translation puts it, "Love keeps no record of wrongs." There are just some things that are done that you just forgive. You cover them. Covering another's transgression is the essence of forgiveness. Psalm 32:1 makes this clear. Listen to what Psalm 32:1 says, "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." those are parallel statements. "How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven," or another way to say it, "Whose sin is covered." To cover a sin is to forgive a sin. We go through life covering a multitude of sins. You cover them with your spouse, you

cover them with your children, you cover them with Christian friends, you cover them in the life of the church, you cover them with co-workers. You just cannot go through life turning everyone's failures into confrontation. That's a Hebrew parallelism. How blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. It's two ways of saying the same thing. Psalm 85:2 again draws the same parallel. "You forgave the iniquity of your people, You covered all their sin." So when the Bible uses a language of covering sin, it means forgiving it. It's not talking about hiding it so that it can flourish in a hidden fashion, it's talking about forgiving it. Love covers a multitude of sins. And so we go through life and we are eager to cover sin. We are eager to forgive sin.

There's an illustration of this unconditional unilateral forgiveness. I'll read it to you, Mark 11:25 and 26, listen to just this opening part. Our Lord says, "Whenever you stand praying, forgive if you have anything against anyone." Wow. That's unilateral, there's no confrontation, there's nobody there, there's nobody to talk to. He doesn't say go home and find the guy and make it right. There is an indication of that in Matthew chapter 5 on some issues that's important. But when it comes to forgiveness, when you start to pray to God, stop before you pray and forgive anybody against whom you are holding anything, or your Father in heaven is not going to forgive you when you get to the part of your prayer where you're asking Him to wash you and make you clean. Immediate forgiveness granted to the offender when the offender's not even there with no formal meeting and no transaction required, it's not necessary.

I've had people come to me through my ministry, it's just really bizarre, and say, "I just...I just want to ask you to forgive me."

And I'll say, "Well, okay I forgive you. What did you do?"

"Well you don't know what I did but here's what I did..."

Please, I don't need to know what you did to forgive you, I forgive you anyway. Why are we making an issue out of it?

"Well I need to bring it up, I need to tell you about it."

No, you don't need to tell me about it. Well they'll often lay out some thing and I'll say, "Wow, maybe I shouldn't forgive them, that's pretty serious stuff. I was a lot better off before you dumped all that on me. I don't need all that."

I've actually had people write me letters and say, "I need you to forgive me because this is what I thought of you for so long." I don't even know who they are. Somebody told them they can't get right with God until they unload on me all this stuff and then ask me to forgive it. Look, we go through life just as forgivers. We should marked that way. So while you're going to pray and ask the Lord as you

work your way through the disciples' prayer, you're finally going to get to the "forgive us our trespasses" part, you better make sure that before you start you've forgiven in your own heart. There is an unconditional, unilateral forgiveness that should dominate our lives. We just live graciously, we just live lovingly. We just live humbly.

I was thinking the other day when Melinda first went work with the Grace To You, they put her on the website and she was working on the website and getting all the e-mail. I don't get e-mail cause it would paralyze my life. And so it comes to Grace To You and she went to work there and she grew up at Grace Church so she thought most people liked her dad. And then she started getting some of these crazy people that send in these terrible assaults and attacks. And this was new revolution...revelation to her, she didn't know this...this world was out there.

But there is a pretty hostile world out there and they like to attack people. And so she started getting this stuff. And bless her heart, she thought she would rise to the defense of her father and so she started firing back these things saying, "You don't know my Dad, who do you think you are? You have no idea who my Dad is. I live with my Dad. I know who my Dad is. You're all wrong. You've got to stop this." Which is like pouring gas on the fire, you know. Now they've got to the family. Now they've got to the kids. Now they've accomplished their deal. And...and people always ask me, "How do you deal with criticism? How do you deal with that kind of thing?"

You know, look it's immaterial to me. There's no place in my heart for that. It doesn't have a place in my heart. It can't have a place in my heart because I have been forgiven everything by God. Who am I not to forgive the petty things that are against me? I choose to live my life covering a multitude of sins. I can't turn everything into a massive issue and everything into a massive confrontation. This does not mitigate against church discipline, it's crystal clear when a sin has reached the level of public revelation and is a course from which a person will not turn and becomes to one degree or another habitual, then it is to be dealt with clearly. But the vast issues that face us in life, we just cannot spend our time tracking all these things down and developing confrontations at every point. We never have done that. Have you noticed that....I'm telling you this because this is the biblical truth, but you never lived like this anyway because you know instinctively how the Spirit of God operates in your heart and you live to cover a multitude of sins. You're not running out trying to get the pound of flesh out of everybody, slap a lawsuit on everybody that you can find and see over every small issue. You don't do that because you're regenerate, because you're led by the Spirit, you've been humbled, you've been forgiven and forgiveness is there in your heart and you give it freely and you give it joyfully and you don't allow a root of bitterness to rise up within you.

I would think that David would have been the most forgiving kind of person. Look at 2 Samuel chapter 11. When you think about what happened in his life and the forgiveness that he experienced, in 2 Samuel chapter 11, a familiar story, it happened in the spring at the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab and his servants with him and all Israel and they destroyed the sons of Amman and

besieged Ramah, here's the bad part, but David stayed at Jerusalem. If you're the General of the Army, you don't stay home. You don't send out all of your assistants, and all of your lieutenants and all of your colonels and sit at home and relax in your palace while they're out fighting a war. He stayed at home, a bad choice. And when evening came, David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house and if you're the king, your roof is higher than everybody else's. And from the roof he saw a woman bathing and the woman was very beautiful in appearance. And David sent and acquired about the woman and one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" She has a family. She has parents. She has a husband. And David sent messengers and took her. And when she came to him, he lay with her and then there's a little phrase here, "When she had purified herself from her uncleanness, she returned to her house." This is indicative of her monthly time and sets up the fact that when she becomes pregnant it could only have been David. "And the woman conceived, she sent and told David and said, 'I'm pregnant.' And David sent to Joab who's his general and said, 'Send me Uriah the Hittite.' So Joab sent Uriah."

Uriah out there fighting the battle against the Ammonites. And Joab comes in, gets the message, goes to the battlefield, gets Uriah, sends him to the king. Pretty important deal. This foot soldier's coming to see the king. "When Uriah came to him, David asked concerning the welfare of Joab and the people and the state of the war." Come on. Small talk. "How do you think the war's going, Private?" Are you kidding? "Then David said to Uriah, 'Go down to your house and wash your feet.'" Wash your feet is exactly the last thing you did before you went to bed. There was either dirt or dust everywhere, even inside the house. And so the last thing you did before you put your feet in bed was wash them. Wash your feet means go home and go to bed, sleep with your wife. "Uriah went out of the king's house and a present from the king was sent out after him." David gave him something to add to the romance of the evening. Wanted him to go home, lay with his wife and then the child would be assumed to have been from Uriah.

This is a man with a lot of integrity. Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord and didn't go down to his house. He slept right there at the door of the palace. And when they told David saying Uriah didn't come down to his house. David said to Uriah, "Have you not come from a journey, you've been gone a long time, you've got to want to go home and see your wife. Why did you not go down to your house?" And Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters, this is a state of war. God doesn't even have a permanent house and the army's out there fighting a battle, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field, shall I then go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul I will not do this thing." I like this guy. That's a lot of integrity in this guy. And he had a beautiful wife.

Well David's got a problem now. It would be hard to cover the deal. "So David said to Uriah, 'Stay here today also and tomorrow I'll let you go.' So Uriah remained in Jerusalem." He's thinking another day he'd go home. He didn't. So David had to bribe him. Come back another day, offered him a feast.



Here he is, this nobody, eating with the king and drinking and David made him drunk, trying to induce him to lose touch with his convictions. And in the evening he went out to lie on his bed with his lord's servants, but he didn't go down to his house. What a man. What a horrible, horrible thing for David to do. David had no choice. David had to kill him. So David sent word, send him back, take him out to the battlefield, retreat, let the enemy kill him. And that's exactly what happened. He was dead, now she's a widow. David sends, in verse 27 of the eleventh chapter, brings her to his house, she became his wife. She bore him a son. The thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the Lord.

Really, he should have died twice. Adultery was a capital offense, murder was a capital offense by the Law of God. But I want you to go to chapter 12 verse 13. David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." All sin is directed against the Lord. All sin is directed against the Lord. "Against Thee, Thee only have I sinned," Psalm 51. It's at this point that David writes Psalm 32, it's at this point that he writes Psalm 51, those two magnificent confessions of sin. And Nathan brings a message from God, Nathan the prophet. Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has taken away your sin, you shall not die." Literally the Lord has caused your sin to pass away, to disappear. It is the glory of God to forgive. Proverbs 19:11 says, "It is a man's glory to pass by a transgression." God obviously is by nature a forgiving God. The prophet Micah says, "Who is a forgiving God like You?" He is caught up in the wonder of God's forgiveness. Psalm 103, "Bless the Lord, O my soul who pardons all your iniquities." That's God. He is a forgiving God. It is God's glory to forgive. It is our's as well.

And so, when we forgive, we are demonstrating the relationship that we possess with God. Now I want to think about this just a little more practically and wrap it up with some key points. Here are some reasons to forgive. And I'm suggesting them to you on the basis of what we just said. Number one, forgiveness is the most God-like act a person can do. Never are you more like God than when you forgive. In Matthew chapter 5 verse 44, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says this, "I say to you, love your enemies," that implies forgiveness. "Pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven." You are like your God in heaven when you love your enemies, that's those who harm you, when you pray for those who persecute you, that's those who inflict damage on you. You are like your Father who is in heaven because He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good. He sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax gatherers do the same?

Loving enemies, forgiving enemies is God-like. It's what makes you sons of your Father who is in heaven. The true Son, the Lord Jesus on the cross, manifest that when He says to the ones who were killing Him...of the ones, I should say, who are killing Him, "Father...what?...forgive them." That's the magnanimous heart of God. Listen to Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving each other just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." You forgive just like God in Christ has forgiven you." And the next verse says, "Therefore be imitators of God as beloved children." Never are you more manifestly the children of God, more like God than when you forgive.

Let me give you a second point. Whoever has offended you has offended God more. And if He forgives, who are you not to forgive? Psalm 51, that very Psalm rising out of David's horrific sin with Bathsheba and Uriah is a testimony to this understanding. David writes this in verse 4...well, we'll start in verse 3, "I know my transgression, my sin is ever before me." He couldn't escape it and the guilt of it. "Against Thee, Thee only I have sinned." What about Uriah? Didn't you sin against Uriah? Not on a human level. What about Bathsheba? Didn't you sin against Bathsheba? Yes. What about the baby that was born, didn't you sin in a sense against that child? Yes, and that child lost its life in infancy. And didn't you sin against your children by the example of adultery and murder that you set? Yes. And didn't you sin against your nation? But all of that aside, David says, "Against Thee, Thee only I have sinned and done what is evil in Thy sight." All sin is against God primarily, first of all. All sin is against God. And God is the most offended. He is the most offended because all sin is against Him, all sin is not against you, all sin is not against me. Here and there sins are committed against me, here and there, but they are...they are far from being all sin. All sin is against God. All the sins in my life, all the sins in your life, all of them are first and foremost violations of His holy nature, violations of His holy presence, violation of His holy law...all of them are against Him. He is perfectly holy. All sin is an offense against Him. And however you may have offended someone, you have offended God far more. And however you have been offended, God has been offended far more. And if God who is most offended can forgive, then you who are least offended must forgive.

Remember the story Jesus told in Matthew chapter 18 about the man who owed the king an unpayable debt, verses 21 and following? And the king called the man in and said pay the debt. He had embezzled the money that he was supposed to be collecting in taxes from a region and then to give to the king. No money was left, he had embezzled it and it was gone. And you remember the man was pleading his case in Matthew 18 because he owed ten thousand talents, a monumental unpayable amount. The man falls down prostrate, verse 26 Matthew 18 says, "Have patience with me, I'll repay you everything." And the lord of that slave felt compassion and released him, forgave him the debt. Just that simple. That's God and the sinner comes and we have a debt we can't pay, it's unpayable, we don't have the resources, we might think we do but we don't. We fall on our face and we say, "I'll try to pay, I'll try to pay." And he says you can't pay, I'll forgive everything. The rest of the story is so bizarre. The people who heard the story must have been shocked. That slave just forgiven everything, went out, found one of his fellow slaves who owed him a hundred denarii, that's about three months pay, seized him, began to choke him saying, "Pay back what you owe." This fellow slave fell down, began to entreat him, gave the same speech, "Have patience with me and I will repay you." And it was a payable debt. He was unwilling, however, went and threw him in a prison till he should pay back what was owed. Slammed him in debtor's prison where it would take him years to ever earn it and pay it back. And the Lord was infuriated at that. You wicked slave, I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me? Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?" And his Lord moved with anger handed him over to the torturers that he should repay all that was owed him. "So shall my heavenly Father also do to you if you don't forgive

your brother from the heart."

Whatever has offended you has offended God far more. And God forgives everything. And you're no higher court, nor are you more holy. If God has forgiven the greater, we must forgive the lesser.

And then I would add another point to think about and it came out of the end of that story. Failure to forgive results in divine chastening. This man in the story was turned over to the torturers, turned over to the tormentors. This is a picture of discipline, where God exacts out of him everything He can get...even though he is a forgiven child. This is discipline, this is chastening, this is a kind of divine spanking that can go on for a long time to those who will not forgive. James 2:13 says, "Judgment will be merciless to those who show no mercy." Discipline from God, chastening comes to those who don't forgive.

Another thing to think about, a reason to forgive that adds itself to this point about discipline is that if you don't forgive, you won't be forgiven. And that's why the discipline is there. Until a believer forgives, he remains in a temporal sense unforgiven. While in an eternal sense we are forgiven, that's in our justification, in a temporal sense we can be in a condition of being unforgiven in our sanctification. In one sense, all my sins are forgiven because Christ paid the penalty in full. But in another sense, as I go through this world and sin, God will not continually forgive me on a parental level, on a temporal level which opens up blessing and joy to me unless I am forgiving others. If I bear grudges and bitterness and hold back forgiveness, then I am going to feel the chastening of God on one to whom the Lord does not give forgiveness. The chastening stops when the Lord forgives. And He forgives, in this case, when we forgive. I think there are Christian people who have had their sins forgiven on an eternal sense, but on a temporal sense, they're not enjoying the rich fellowship that they should with God and they're undergoing discipline from Him because they don't forgive others. They carry around bitterness. I think the emptiness in people's lives, even those who are Christians, depression, dullness, lack of joy is often due to withheld blessing, withheld forgiveness, guilt and chastening from God.

Another thing to think about is unforgiveness makes you unfit for worship. Unforgiveness makes you unfit for worship. In Matthew 5:23 and 24 Jesus said, "You're going to come and worship Me, you're going to come and bring your gift to the altar. If you have something against your brother, leave and take care of it." You can't pray until you're forgiven, and you can't worship until you're forgiven.

And then just two things to end. Not to forgive is to usurp divine authority...not to forgive is to usurp divine authority. So what are you going to be? The unforgiving one in the universe while God is the forgiving one? Well God forgives endlessly, endlessly all our transgressions all the time on the...on the eternal level. And God willingly forgives our temporal transgressions in the process of our sanctification as we forgive. Are we then going to rip, as it were, the sword out of His hand and become the judge of others? Are we going to be the judge and executioner of others? In Romans 14

Paul says, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the Lord." You leave any necessary retribution to the Lord, it's not for us to render that. Never take your own revenge, Romans 14:19, leave room for the wrath of God. In fact, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink. In so doing you will heap burning coals on his head, you'll produce conviction. Love your enemy, same thing, then you'll be evidently the sons of your Father.

God has alone the right to deal with offenses. God has alone the right to deal with sinners. He has perfect understanding of the issue, the highest standard of holiness, limitless sovereign authority. He is impartial and He knows everything. Let Him deal with it. It's not up to us to inflict pain on people as if we were God.

And then one final thing. Forgive eagerly because you recognize that the offenses against you are allowed by God for your perfection. The offenses against you are allowed by God for your perfection. The Bible is clear about this. "Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, they have a perfect work," James says. Peter says, "After you've suffered a while the Lord make you perfect." As we noted a few weeks ago in our study of 2 Corinthians chapter 12, the Apostle Paul understands so well the benefit of suffering. "I would rather boast...he says...about my weaknesses that the power of Christ may dwell in me. I'm content with weaknesses, insults, distresses, persecutions, difficulties for Christ's sake, for when I'm weak, then I'm strong." Instead of retaliating, instead of being angry and hostile when you are offended by someone, when you are sinned against by someone, understand that God though He doesn't will their sin against you and though He doesn't cause their sin against you, will make that trial a perfecting trial if you react in a spiritual way. And He will give you grace and for Himself gain glory out of that trial. Your only responsibility is to forgive.

Forgiveness then marks true disciples of Christ. We are those who do not lead others into sin but when they fall into sin, even against us, we eagerly forgive. And if the sin is willful, premeditated, planned, directional sins of repeated choice, we confront, we rebuke, we call for repentance, we go through the process in Matthew and if need be, put them out. But hopefully that process will end with them repenting and we restore them. But if they repent, no matter how many times they do, we always forgive. All repentance is responded to with forgiveness. So whether it's that conditional forgiveness, or that unconditional forgiveness, we are eager forgivers because we want to be manifestly like our Father. Let's pray.

Father, again we are overwhelmed that You have forgiven us all our transgressions, that You have given to us full and complete forgiveness for our sins so that we have the hope of heaven and that hope can never ever be forfeited. Jesus paid in full the penalty for our sins on the cross. It's not a question of justification, but in our sanctification, in our daily lives even though we've already been bathed, we've already had a spiritual bath, as our Lord said to Peter, we still need our feet washed because as we walk through this world we get them dirty, we stumble into sin here and there, and though it does not effect our justification it effects our sanctification and we want to continue to be

forgiven. We want to step out from under chastening into the full blessing of obedience. So make us forgivers from the heart as we understand that we're all still struggling with our unredeemed human flesh. May we be eager to love and therefore demonstrate that we are Your children because we love as You loved us. In Christ's name we ask. Amen.

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